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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 AMMAN 000516

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SUBJECT: JORDAN'S PM RESHUFFLES HIS CABINET

REF: A. 08 AMMAN 3116

¶B. 08 AMMAN 1446

¶C. 07 AMMAN 4693

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The long-anticipated reshuffle of Jordanian PM Nader Al-Dahabi's cabinet took place on February 23, with ten ministers replaced and five ministers changing portfolios. At first glance, the reshuffled cabinet has fewer proponents of reform and gives a larger voice to security-conscious East Bank conservatives. Initial commentary from the press and our contacts paints the reshuffle as uninspired, with some already speculating that the Dahabi government will be replaced by the end of the year. End Summary.

Changes in Ministers, More Focus on Security

¶2. (SBU) On February 23, King Abdullah swore in the new members of Jordan's government. Ten new ministers have been brought into the new cabinet, and five ministers from the previous team have changed portfolios. While most of the changes were to peripheral ministries, changes at the head of the ministries of interior, foreign affairs, and finance promise to be more significant. At first glance, the reshuffled cabinet has fewer proponents of reform and gives a larger voice to security-conscious East Bank conservatives. Note: The government no longer contains any authors or architects of the 2006 National Agenda, a ten-year blueprint for reform. End Note. Like the last cabinet, there are only four women ministers and an under-representation of Palestinians in terms of Jordan's population at large. Representation of tribes and other ethno-religious groups remains essentially the same following the reshuffle.

¶3. (C) Pundits generally see the choice of ministers as uninspired, and are pointing to the new lineup as proof that the Dahabi government will not last through the year. Al-Arab Al-Yawm editor Fahd Al-Kitan wrote February 23 that "it will only be a matter of months before a change (in the Prime Ministry) takes place." Ousted Royal Court Chief Bassem Awadallah told the Ambassador that the reshuffle was a move to extend the government's tenure by appeasing its East Banker power base. Awadallah agreed with media commentaries, which noted that the reconstituted government has no organizing principle or agenda with which it can make its mark.

¶4. (C) Several senior figures from the Dahabi government are leaving as a result of the reshuffle. Interior Minister Eid Al-Fayez held significant power in the Dahabi and Bakhit governments, where he championed the cause of security-oriented conservatives but was still less conservative than the incoming interior minister. On the other end of the political spectrum, the departures of Foreign Minister Salah Al-Bashir, Minister of Finance Hamid Hasasbeh, and Minister of Health Salah Mawajdeh was an expected result of their closeness to ousted pro-reform Royal

Court Chief Bassem Awadallah.

The Big Three

Minister of Interior: Nayef Al-Qadi

15. (SBU/NF) Qadi is a Muslim East Banker who was born in Hawsha, near Mafraq, in 1944. He is the son of a prominent sheikh from the Bani Khaled tribe. Qadi obtained his BA in political science from Baghdad University. He is a career diplomat with nearly 30 years of experience, primarily in the Arab world, with tours in Iraq as DCM (1969-1973), London as Consul (1973-1980), Representative to the Arab League (1980-1983), DCM in Beirut (1983-1989), Ambassador to Qatar (1989-1993), and Ambassador to Egypt (1993-1994). He was part of the delegation that negotiated the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty. Qadi was appointed to the upper house of parliament in 1997, where he served until being appointed Minister of Interior in 1998. Qadi served as Minister of Interior until 2000, overseeing the closure of Hamas' Jordan office in August 1999.

16. (C/NF) Qadi has the reputation of being an East Banker establishment conservative par excellence - so much so that some quarters consider him to be anti-Palestinian. While his predecessor merely sought to delay or water down reform, Qadi is seen as an outright opponent of reform.

Foreign Minister: Nasser Judeh

17. (C/NF) Judeh was born in Amman in 1960 and holds a BA in AMMAN 00000516 002 OF 005

International Relations from American University and an MA from Georgetown. He served at the Royal Court, first in King Hussein's Press Office and later as private secretary to King Hussein's brother, Prince Hassan. In 1992 he was posted to London to establish and head the Jordan Information Bureau. Judeh was appointed director of Jordan Television in 1994 and director of the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation in 1998. He was Minister of Information prior to the ministry's dissolution. He was later appointed government spokesman, a position that was elevated to ministerial rank in 2007 when he was passed over for the position he now holds. He was married to Princess Sumaya, President of the Royal Scientific Society and a daughter of Prince Hassan, until their divorce in 2007. Judeh is the son of Sami Judeh, a former Minister of State. One of his uncles is former Prime Minister and current Speaker of the Senate Zaid Al-Rifa'i.

18. (C/NF) Contacts are scratching their heads about Judeh's move from Media Affairs to Foreign Affairs. They paint Judeh as arrogant and calculating, and also voice concerns about his lack of foreign affairs knowledge and experience.

Minister of Finance: Bassem Salem

19. (SBU/NF) A Christian East Banker, Salem has served as Minister of Labor since 2005. Born in 1956 in al-Husn in Irbid Governorate, and son of the late former Senator and Central Bank Governor Khalid Salem, Bassem Salem earned a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the University of London in 1979. Upon his return to Jordan in the early 1980s, he started a manufacturing plant to produce plastics and packaging materials. He expanded his business into several manufacturing facilities, including confectioneries, as well as founding a trading company. He recently acquired one of the smaller mining operations that was privatized by the government. In the mid 1990s he co-founded the Jordan Export and Finance Bank, and still serves on its board. He also served as board member of the Central Bank of Jordan. Salem was Labor Minister briefly in 2005. Salem has a cosmopolitan outlook, displays an obvious love for the law, and can converse easily on diverse subjects such as regional Arab artists. He travels to England regularly. Married with

one son, Salem is fluent in English.

¶10. (C/NF) Salem's switch to the finance portfolio will mark a distinct change in perspective at the ministry, which for the last two years has been in the hands of a technocrat from the ministry's own ranks. Salem is an outsider who comes in with more of a business background, although his detractors in the business world point to his time as Minister of Labor as proof that he is not necessarily on the side of Jordan's business community. Salem is very unpopular with members of parliament, who uniformly portray him as disrespectful and dismissive of their concerns. Salem's detractors within the Ministry of Labor viewed him as impulsive and lacking a long-term outlook. With the impact of the global financial crisis already apparent in Jordan, Salem will likely make further enemies as strains on Jordan's budget continue to grow. Some speculate that he is being set up as the fall guy for the already noticeable decline in Jordan's economic fortunes.

Incoming Ministers

Minister of Political Development: Musa Al-Ma'aytah

¶11. (C/NF) A curious choice for minister of Political Development, Ma'aytah was born in Irbid in 1954 and has an MA in communications engineering from the University of Bucharest (1981). Ma'aytah has a long history of political activism in support of leftist causes, many of which survived government crackdowns due to their political irrelevance. Following the legalization of socialist and communist parties in 1990, Ma'aytah founded the Democratic Socialist Party. When that effort failed to take root, he founded the United Democratic Party, later renamed the Democratic Party of the Left. That party was disbanded by the government in 2008 following the enactment of a new political parties law. The law required that every party have at least 500 members, and Ma'aytah's party failed to make the cut.

¶12. (C/NF) MOPD is a marginal ministry and up until now has little real authority within the government. Yet the appointment of a minister from the ranks of Jordan's notoriously weak political parties is an important symbolic gesture. Since the political parties law was enacted, parties that survived and those that did not have been unanimous in their condemnation of the outgoing minister of Political Development, who did little to empower Jordan's political parties in spite of his mandate to do so. In particular, parties have criticized the paltry sums given out to political parties from the MOPD-controlled fund - just JD

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50,000 (USD 70,000) per party, per year. Now Jordan's officials of political parties have one of their own in the government and may expect increased funding and access to the decision-making process.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs: Ghaleb Al-Zu'bi

¶13. (SBU/NF) Zu'bi is a Muslim East Banker, who was born in Salt in 1943. He holds a BA in Law from Damascus University (1967) and an MA in Law from an Egyptian university (1981). Zu'bi served as the director of the Anti-Narcotics Department and as head of the Amman police department. He was an MP in the lower house from 1997-2001 and 2003-2007, serving as head of the legal committee for the entire eight years.

Minister of State for Media Affairs: Nabil Al-Sharif

¶14. (SBU/NF) Sharif is a Muslim of Palestinian origin. He was born in Al-Arish, Egypt in 1952. His BA is in English Literature from Kuwait University (1977), and his MA and PhD are in English Literature from University of Indiana (1981 and 1982). Sharif was an English teacher in Kuwait from 1977-1979. Sharif served as a professor of English

literature at Yarmouk University in Irbid from 1982 to 1987. He then moved to the University of Jordan, where he was a professor of English Literature from 1987 to 1991, serving part-time as an editor at Al-Dustour newspaper during that period. In 1992, Sharif became Editor-in-Chief of Al-Dustour, and still writes an occasional column for Al-Dustour today. Sharif left Al-Dustour in 2003 when he was appointed as Minister of Information, a job he held for two years, followed by a stint as Jordanian Ambassador to Morocco. He then returned to Al-Dustour as Editor-in-Chief.

¶15. (C) Under the banner of Al-Dustour, Sharif recently organized a public moot court in which Israeli leaders were "tried" for war crimes. The event was mostly a publicity stunt, but Sharif's standing helped to attract prominent figures from civil society to participate. Sharif's first public statement in his new role focused on the "Judaization" of Jerusalem, characterizing the eviction of Palestinians from the Silwan district as "a violation of international law and a transgression against UN resolutions."

Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research: Walid Ma'ani

¶16. (SBU/NF) Dr. Walid Al-Ma'ani is a Muslim, East Banker, born in Karak in 1946. Ma'ani received his MD from the University of Alexandria in Egypt in 1969. Ma'ani was in private practice and taught neurosurgery until 1998 when he was appointed as the President of the University of Jordan. Ma'ani has published over twenty articles on neurosurgery in international journals, and he is a member of several Jordanian and British societies for neurosurgery. Ma'ani has also served on the Fulbright board. He was appointed as Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research in January 2002 and was re-designated Minister of Health in September 2002.

Minister of Agriculture: Said Al-Masri

¶17. (C/NF) Masri was born in Amman in 1955 and has a BA in civil engineering from Alexandria University in Egypt (1981). Masri worked in the Jordanian real estate sector until 1987 when he took a position with the Jordan River Foundation, a quasi-governmental organization devoted to economic development of the Jordan River Valley. Masri left the Jordan River Foundation in 1997 for a job in the private sector as an agricultural exporter. Masri is portrayed by our contacts as smart, competent, and respected. He lacks experience in government, however, and will face a difficult challenge in the midst of a drought. Masri is married, with three boys and two girls.

Minister of Health: Nayef Al-Fayez

¶18. (C/NF) Fayez was born in Lubban (near Madaba) in 1947. He holds a PhD in medicine from the University of Damascus where he specialized in neurosurgery. Following his academic work, Fayez practiced neurosurgery at King Fahd National Guard Hospital in Saudi Arabia. He is the former chair of the Society of Jordanian Neurosurgeons. He was elected to parliament in 2003, and served as the first deputy speaker until he left the parliament in 2007. While the outgoing Minister of Health was a confidant of ousted royal court chief Bassem Awadallah, Fayez comes in as a technocrat with few political credentials beyond his brief stint in parliament. Contacts describe him as socially awkward.

Minister of Labor: Ghazi Shbeikat

¶19. (SBU/NF) Shbeikat was born in Amman in 1966. He

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obtained his BA from Yarmouk University, an MA from University of Jordan, and a PhD in economics from the University of Tennessee. He served as a researcher at Jordan's Central Bank from 1990 to 2002 and then became a

consultant of the executive director of the IMF in Washington. In 2006, Shbeikat returned to Jordan, where he assumed the post of Director General of the Department of Statistics. In 2008, he was promoted to the post of Secretary General of the Ministry of Labor by outgoing Minister Bassem Salem.

¶20. (C/NF) Shbeikat's elevation to ministerial rank is puzzling -- he is an economist with no labor background. He confided to Econoffs as early as 2007 that he was looking to get out of government work and return to the private sector. Shbeikat is a notorious micromanager, and maintains poor relations with his staff who see him as fickle and unreliable. On the policy front, Shbeikat is acutely aware of the difficult task he faces in pushing a series of controversial amendments to Jordan's labor law through parliament, but he remains committed to the reforms as a necessary part of Jordan's compliance with international labor standards.

Minister of State for Legal Affairs: Salem Khazaleh

¶21. (C/NF) Khazaleh, a Muslim East Banker, was born in Dajania (near Mafraq) in 1963. He has a BA in Law and an MA in Legal Theory from the University of Jordan. Khazaleh worked for private companies and law firms for several years before assuming the post of companies controller within the Audit Bureau. Khazaleh served for a brief time as Minister of Public Sector Development before being appointed as Minister of Industry and Trade from 2006 to 2007. Khazaleh was later named as the head of the Ombudsman Bureau in 2008. Khazaleh will act as the Solicitor General equivalent - a role that has very little power and even less public exposure. Khazaleh's elevation to ministerial status is a reward for his hard work, but he leaves the Ombudsman Bureau rudderless just as it begins to stand on its own two feet. Khazaleh understands English fairly well, but he prefers to use an interpreter for the sake of clarity.

Minister of Culture: Sabri Rbeihat

¶22. (SBU/NF) Rbeihat holds a BS in Education and Sociology from the University of Jordan, along with an MA and PhD in Sociology from the University of Southern California. He is the founder and head of the South-North Center for Dialogue and Development and has served as an advisor to the UN on disability issues. Rbeihat was in charge of the research and planning unit of the Rehabilitation and Correctional Centers Directorate and served as head of the training unit of the Royal Police Academy. Rbeihat was the Minister of Political Development and the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs from 2005 to 2007.

Same Minister, Different Portfolio

Minister of Transport: Sahl Majali

¶23. (SBU/NF) Son of Parliament Speaker Abdulhadi Majali, Sahl is the longtime head of the family construction firm MID Contracting, which has had extensive dealings with construction projects in Iraq. Born in 1962, he is an East Banker who received his BA in civil engineering from the University of London and a Masters in construction from George Washington University. Majali was the head of the Jordan Contractors Association from 2000 to 2002 and from 2006 until his appointment as minister of Public Works and Housing in November 2007. Majali traded his portfolio to Alaa Batayneh in return for the latter's position as Minister of Transport.

Minister of Public Works and Housing: Alaa Batayneh

¶24. (SBU/NF) Batayneh, an East Banker, is a former director of Jordan's customs service. As part of the reshuffle, he traded the transport portfolio for public works and housing. Born in 1969 in Amman, Batayneh has a BS in electrical engineering and an MS in management information systems from

George Washington University. Batayneh is married to a daughter of Prince Hassan. Note: Nasser Judeh, now Minister of Foreign Affairs, recently divorced Prince Hassan's other daughter. End Note. In addition to his job as the head of the customs service, Batayneh was the Secretary General of the Ministry of Transport, and has also served as the Chairman of the Arab Bridge Maritime Company. Batayneh is well-liked by his staff and has the general reputation of being a competent bureaucrat.

Minister of Public Sector Reform: Nancy Bakir

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¶25. (SBU/NF) A Circassian East Banker, Bakir has served as the Minister of Culture for the past two years. She was born in Amman in 1952. A Humphrey Fellow (1983-1984), Bakir holds an MS in Managerial and Educational Development from Boston University and also studied in the former Soviet Union. She served as the head of the human rights department at the Prime Ministry before joining the Arab League, where she was the Assistant Arab League Secretary General for Social Affairs. Upon her return to Jordan, Bakir became secretary general of the Ministry of Administrative Development and had several jobs in the higher council for science and technology. She was appointed an advisor to the Prime Ministry in 1999. It is surprising to see Bakir taking on new responsibilities, as she frequently expressed a deep unhappiness with her position as Minister of Culture and desire to leave the government altogether.

Beecroft